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Joseph Ratzinger's Soteriological Inclusivism

ABSTRACT

This article examines the position of Joseph Ratzinger with regard to the classical question in the field of the theology of religions, the salvation of non-Christians. In criticism of a recent book by Ambrose Mong, it is argued that Ratzinger is not a soteriological exclusivist but an *optimistic restrictivist inclusivist*. As explained by Gavin D'Costa, restrictivist inclusivists allow for the salvation of non-Christians, though they do not regard non-Christian religions as salvific structures per se. While restricting the salvific activity of God to the human conscience or certain positive elements in non-Christian cultures, this kind of an inclusivist may still be a soteriological optimist, as proves to be the case with Ratzinger. Having examined the subjective and objective aspects of Ratzinger's inclusivism, namely the concepts of conscience and *Stellvertretung* (vicarious representation), the article shows that in the 2007 encyclical *Spe Salvi* the two lines of thought are combined by Pope Benedict XVI in a reinterpretation of the doctrine of Purgatory, in such a way that 'the great majority' of men are believed to reach eternal salvation.

In¹ his 2015 book *Are Non-Christians Saved? Joseph Ratzinger's Thoughts on Religious Pluralism*, Ambrose Mong touches on the classical question in the field of the theology of religions from the perspective of the thought of Joseph Ratzinger, also known as Pope Benedict XVI.² Can non-Christians be saved? Where should Joseph Ratzinger be situated with regard to the three standard alternatives of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism? Surprisingly, despite Ratzinger's well-known interest in the theology of religions, this aspect of his thought has received remarkably little scholarly attention prior to Mong.³ On the other hand, the scarcity of

¹ I would like to thank the Utrecht Network for the Young Researchers grant that enabled me to work on this article in November 2016 at the University of Malta. In addition to the Faculty of Theology of the University of Malta, especially Dr John Berry, I would also like to thank the Faculty of Theology of the University of Navarra, especially Dr Pablo Blanco, as well as Dr Oskari Juurikkala, Dr Jyri Komulainen, and prof. Miikka Ruokanen (University of Helsinki), for their invaluable comments, criticisms, and encouragement.

² Ambrose Mong, *Are Non-Christians Saved? Joseph Ratzinger's Thoughts on Religious Pluralism* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2015). Mong is a Dominican priest based in Hong Kong.

³ Some of the standard introductions to Ratzinger's theology ignore the question altogether, while others touch on it only implicitly or in passing. For examples of the latter, see Vincent Twomey, *Pope Benedict XVI: The Conscience of Our Age: A Theological Portrait* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), p. 55; Aidan Nichols OP, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger* (London: Burns & Oates, 2007), pp. 108–109; James Corkery, S.J., *Joseph Ratzinger's Theological Ideas: Wise Cautions and Legitimate*

academic interest in the topic is understandable in the light of Ratzinger's explicit criticism of the traditional way of posing the question. In *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, Ratzinger is emphatic that the question of religions should not be reduced to the question of salvation, and vice versa.⁴

Nonetheless, Ratzinger does in fact address the issue on several occasions. Although the dispute between exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism was not the main concern in *Truth and Tolerance*, Ratzinger realised that 'the questions raised will nonetheless be with us all along'.⁵ Ratzinger's attitude mirrors the wider situation in the study of the theology of religions: while

Hopes (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), pp. 62, 154; Pablo Blanco Sarto, *La Teología de Joseph Ratzinger, Una Introducción*, Palabra, 2011), pp. 379–381. For the best treatment so far, see Christopher Ruddy, "'For the Many": The Vicarious-Representative Heart of Joseph Ratzinger's Theology,' *Theological Studies* 75 (2014), pp. 564–584. However, in Ruddy's article the salvation of non-Christians is only one of the subtopics examined in light of 'vicarious representation.'

⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), p. 53. This is noted by Blanco Sarto, *La Teología*, pp. 371–372; Nichols, *Pope Benedict XVI*, p. 207; Rocco Viviano, *The Theological-Ecclesiological Thought of Benedict XVI (2005–2013) on the Christian Engagement with the Religions in the Context of the Modern Papacy* (London: Heythrop College, 2013) pp. 206–207. <http://www.heythrop.ac.uk/sites/default/files/docs/publications/theses/Rocco%20PhD%20Thesis.compressed.pdf>

⁵ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, p. 53.

the standard typology is criticized and provided with alternatives,⁶ it still continues to be employed as a helpful analytic tool. For example, Paul Griffiths and Gavin D'Costa, the two scholars referred to by Mong in his analysis of the topic, have recently differentiated between various kinds of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, refining the traditional typology and enabling greater analytic precision.⁷

Griffiths and D'Costa's paradigms will serve as a point of reference in this article, which aims at reliably locating Joseph Ratzinger on the exclusivist-inclusivist-pluralist map from the point of view of soteriology, i.e. the question of whether non-Christians can be saved and how. In criticism of Ambrose Mong, it will be argued that Ratzinger is an *optimistic restrictivist inclusivist*. Furthermore, in addition to a simple classification, the analysis of Ratzinger's writings will bring to light the specific structure of Ratzinger's soteriological inclusivism, which includes both a subjective and an objective aspect as well as a present and a future dimension. Thus, in spite of his reservations, Ratzinger/Benedict XVI is shown to offer a rather comprehensive inclusivist theory to the discernment of the theological and ecclesial communities.

Ratzinger the Soteriological Exclusivist?

⁶ See, for example, J. A. DiNoia, O.P., *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992), pp. 34–64.

⁷ Paul Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001), 53–64; Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 6–7.

Regardless of its title, only a relatively short section of Ambrose Mong's book explicitly deals with the question of Ratzinger's position with regard to the salvation of non-Christians.⁸ In Mong's own words, he 'seeks to show that Ratzinger's perception of non-Christian religions as valid paths to salvation is essentially pessimistic and negative. He believes that there may be revelation in these religions but not salvation'.⁹ With regard to the question of salvation, Mong claims that Ratzinger 'believes that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation', which makes him 'an exclusivist'.¹⁰ On the other hand, with regard to the question of truth (which Mong equates with 'revelation'), Ratzinger reveals an 'open inclusivism in which he acknowledges that truths found in non-Christian religions may be of significance for the church'.¹¹

⁸ Mong, *Non-Christians*, pp. 22–43, i.e. chapter two. The rest of the book deals with various related aspects of Ratzinger's theology, including ecclesiology and ecumenism, as well as official investigations of theologians (such as Jacques Dupuis and Tissa Balasuriya) when Ratzinger was the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The dissonance between the title and the contents may be related to the fact that substantially the same book was published in the United States under another title, *Dialogue Derailed: Joseph Ratzinger's War against Pluralist Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015).

⁹ Mong, *Non-Christians*, p. 22.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Both the term ‘open inclusivism’ and the important distinction between the categories of truth and salvation are found in the work of Paul Griffiths.¹² Mong is correct in associating Ratzinger with the ‘open inclusivism’ advocated by Griffiths, as opposed to a ‘closed inclusivism’ which would hold that ‘all alien religious truths (should there be any) are already known to and explicitly taught by the home religion in some form’.¹³ Mong is also correct in associating Ratzinger with Gavin D’Costa’s category of ‘restrictivist inclusivists’, as opposed to ‘structural inclusivists’, but this also marks the beginning of much confusion, for neither D’Costa nor Mong keep clear the distinction recalled by Griffiths between the separate issues of truth and salvation.¹⁴

¹² Griffiths, *Religious Diversity*, p. 54, 59–64. Griffiths is emphatic that he only concerns himself with the question about truth, not the question about salvation.

¹³ Ibid., p. 59. See Mong, *Non-Christians*, pp. 23, 31. However, Mong is wrong in equating the concepts of truth and revelation. Ratzinger does not speak of divine revelation in other religions. On the contrary, in his farewell speech to the parish priests and clergy of Rome in 2013, Pope Benedict XVI distinguishes between the one true word of God in the incarnate Christ and truths discovered through ‘religious experience’, and a ‘certain human light from creation’ in other religions. See Pope Benedict XVI, *Meeting with the parish priests and the clergy of Rome* (14 Feb 2013), available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2013/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20130214_clero-roma.html.

¹⁴ Confusingly, Mong, *Non-Christians*, pp. 30–31, states that Ratzinger is ‘in one sense’ (what sense?) closer to the restrictivist inclusivists, while ‘in another sense’ he is closer to open inclusivism. But these two positions are not alternatives in the same system. It would be fully

D'Costa explains the difference between the two forms of inclusivism as follows:

(a) *Structural inclusivists* hold that Christ is the normative revelation of God, although salvation is possible outside of the explicit Christian church. Salvation is, or may be, available through other religions *per se*, but this salvation is always from Christ. . . . (b) *Restrictivist inclusivists* hold that Christ is the normative revelation of God, although salvation is possible outside of the explicit Christian church, but this does not give legitimation to other religions as possible or actual salvific structures. These theologians are careful to restrict the sense of God's inclusiveness to people and elements of their culture, but not their religions *per se*. In both, Christ is ontologically and causally exclusive to salvation, but not necessarily epistemologically.¹⁵

In this definition, the emphasis is clearly on the question of salvation, although Christ is initially described as the 'normative revelation', rather than, say, the 'unique saviour', which would be preferable. In any case, by associating Ratzinger with restrictivist inclusivists Mong greatly confounds the reader, for his emphatic main thesis is that Ratzinger is a soteriological exclusivist, whereas Ratzinger's inclusivism is supposed to extend only to the question of truth or revelation.¹⁶

But what evidence does Mong provide for his main thesis? Paradoxically, the text at the heart of Mong's analysis not only fails to support the case of exclusivism but also contains an explicit rejection of it. In a sermon delivered during Advent in 1964, Ratzinger said: 'The question we have to face is not that of whether other people can be saved and how. We are convinced that God is able to do this. . . and that we do not need to help him do it with our

correct to say that Ratzinger is both an open inclusivist (in Griffiths' terms) and a restrictivist inclusivist (in D'Costa's terms).

¹⁵ D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, p. 7.

¹⁶ Mong, *Non-Christians*, pp. 22, 30, 32.

cogitations.’¹⁷ True, the sermon contains an awareness of the challenge of religious pluralism and a defence of mission, but the motivation for the latter is precisely *not* ‘that all might be saved through the Christian gospel’¹⁸ but simply the fact that to be Christian is to break out of egoism and serve others.¹⁹ The entire starting point of the sermon is the modern conviction that there are ‘many other ways to heaven and to salvation’,²⁰ and the inclusivist substance of the conviction is fundamentally shared, not disputed, by the preacher.²¹ Similarly, *Dominus Iesus* and *Truth and Tolerance*, both of which Mong refers to loosely, actually affirm soteriological inclusivism, not exclusivism.²² In *Truth and Tolerance*, Ratzinger’s exclusion of soteriological exclusivism is

¹⁷ Cited in Mong, *Non-Christians*, p. 26. The entire sermon is found in Joseph Ratzinger, *What It Means to Be a Christian*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), pp. 43–62.

¹⁸ Cf. Mong, *Non-Christians*, p. 26.

¹⁹ Ratzinger, *What It Means*, pp. 54–55, 62.

²⁰ Ratzinger, *What It Means*, p. 46.

²¹ Ratzinger begins the sermon with the soteriologically exclusivist meditation of St. Ignatius of Loyola and comments that today we would be unable to replicate it: ‘Everything we believe about God, and everything we know about man, prevents us from accepting that beyond the limits of the Church there is no more salvation. . . .’ (p. 45) At the end, Ratzinger reformulates Ignatius’ meditation, expressly dropping the exclusivist dimension: ‘Yet beyond what Ignatius suggests, nowadays we will include the insight that God’s mercy, made manifest in Christ, is sufficiently abundant for everyone.’ (p. 62)

²² For *Dominus Iesus*, which Ratzinger signed but did not personally author, see Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration ‘Dominus Iesus’ on the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church* (August 6, 2000), 20–21. The full text is available at

clear from the very outset: ‘Probably no one today takes the position of exclusivism in the sense of denying salvation to all non-Christians.’²³ For Ratzinger, the only remaining options are ‘inclusivism and pluralism’,²⁴ and since the main thrust of the book consists in a criticism of pluralism, it should be evident that Ratzinger falls into the broad category of inclusivism.²⁵

In sum, Mong’s analysis with regard to the question of the salvation of non-Christians according to Joseph Ratzinger is, to borrow a famous phrase from *Dominus Iesus*, ‘gravely deficient’.²⁶ It is not consistent in distinguishing between the issues of truth and salvation, and in the case of the latter, it places Ratzinger in the wrong category. Consequently, a reliable analysis of the most relevant Ratzingerian texts on topic of the salvation of non-Christians is called for, in order to determine the precise characteristics of Ratzinger’s soteriological inclusivism.

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html. For *Truth and Tolerance*, see below.

²³ Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, p. 80.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ The reason Ratzinger does not explicitly characterise his position as inclusivist seems to be the fact that he regards Karl Rahner’s theory of ‘anonymous Christians,’ with which he disagrees, as the paradigmatic example of inclusivism. See Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, pp. 17, 51; Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Sister Mary Frances McCarthy, S.N.D. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), pp. 161–171. What is needed is precisely the sort of distinction D’Costa has made between structural and restrictivist inclusivism.

²⁶ See DI 22. This is by no means to discredit the entirety of Mong’s work, which I consider valuable in many other respects.

Ratzinger's Soteriological Inclusivism

As Christopher Ruddy has recently pointed out, Ratzinger's concern for the question of the salvation of non-Christians emerged as early as the late 1950s.²⁷ His most systematic treatment of the salvation of non-Christians is found in the 1969 book *Das neue Volk Gottes*, in an article titled 'Kein Heil außerhalb der Kirche?' ('No Salvation Outside the Church?').²⁸ There, Ratzinger first traces the history of the old axiom, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus est*, from the Bible and the Fathers through the Council of Florence and the Jansenist controversy to popes Pius IX and Pius XII, culminating in the teaching of Vatican II.²⁹ He then approaches the topic of the salvation of non-Christians from two angles, considering what he calls the subjective and objective aspects of the question. The subjective aspect has to do with the silent call of God to faith and love present in the individual conscience, enabling self-transcendence and salvation.

²⁷ Ruddy, 'For the Many,' p. 575. This is a time in which the Catholic understanding of the salvation of non-Christians is witnessing a significant theological development, led by *ressourcement* theologians such as Henri de Lubac and Yves Congar. In Stephen Bullivant, *The Salvation of Atheists and Catholic Dogmatic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 51, 74, Ratzinger is rightly placed in the same camp with these famous inclusivists.

²⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes. Entwürfe zur Ekklesiologie* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1977 [1969]), pp. 152–177. Only parts of it have been translated into English in *The Ratzinger Reader: Mapping a Theological Journey*, ed. Lieven Boeve & Gerard Mannion (London: T&T Clark, 2010), pp. 154–159.

²⁹ Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes*, pp. 154–166.

The objective aspect refers to the *Stellvertretung* or ‘vicarious representation’ of Christ and his ecclesial body for the entirety of humankind. Since both of these lines of thought represent original and lasting insights in Ratzinger’s soteriological inclusivism, they will be given detailed consideration.

The Subjective Aspect: Conscience, Faith and Love

The importance of the concept of conscience to Ratzinger’s thinking is well illustrated by the fact that an entire portrait of his theology has been written from this perspective.³⁰ Yet, even when the relevance of the idea of conscience for Ratzinger’s theology of religions has otherwise been noted, very little attention has been paid to the role that the concept plays in Ratzinger’s soteriological inclusivism.³¹ Arguably, referring to the silent presence and call of God in the human conscience is Ratzinger’s most consistent way of approaching the question of the salvation of non-Christians. Importantly for the theology of religions, this approach does not exclude the possibility that the various religious traditions might also contain elements of soteriological significance.

³⁰ See Twomey, *Conscience of Our Age*.

³¹ See Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict*, p. 209; Twomey, *Conscience of Our Age*, pp. 55, 131–2; Blanco Sarto, *La Teología*, pp. 176–181, 331–336.

In ‘Kein Heil außerhalb der Kirche?’ Ratzinger says that the New Testament provides two basic answers on how to reach salvation: ‘love alone suffices’ and ‘only faith suffices’.³² Despite an apparent contrast, these two ways actually belong together. Both faith and love express ‘an attitude of self-transcendence, in which the human being begins to leave his egoism behind and to go forth toward the other’. In this exodus, even non-Christian religions can be of assistance. Ratzinger states that ‘many of the realities of the current religious and profane order can become a call to and a help in the saving exodus of self-transcendence’, as long as they serve ‘love and faith’. ‘The religions assist in salvation according to the extent to which they lead to this attitude; they hinder salvation according to the extent to which they hinder this attitude in the human being.’ From this perspective, ‘one is just as likely to encounter a false dismissal of religion and religions as to encounter a false glorification’.³³

Ratzinger is clear in distancing himself from the positions that later became known as exclusivism and pluralism. Combating the latter, Ratzinger opposes the ‘widespread notion that says that everyone should live according to their convictions and will be saved based on the “conscientiousness” that they thereby demonstrate.’³⁴ Here, Ratzinger introduces an argument that he will repeat in various works:

How? Should, for example, the heroism of the SS man, the terrible fidelity of his perverted allegiance, be considered a kind of “Votum ecclesiae?” Never! . . . Conscience degenerates into

³² Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes*, p. 169–170. Reference is made to Mt 22:35–40, Mt 25:31–46, Rom 13:9ff for the first answer and Paul’s doctrine of faith as well as the theme of the ‘poor in spirit’ for the second answer.

³³ ‘No Salvation Outside the Church?’ in *The Ratzinger Reader*, pp. 155–156.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

conscientiousness; the current system becomes the “way to salvation.” It sounds humane and broad-minded when one therefore says, a Muslim should, in order [to] be saved, just be a “good Muslim” (what does that actually mean?), a Hindu should be a good Hindu, and so on. But then, should one not likewise say that a cannibal should just be a good cannibal and a convinced SS man a thoroughgoing SS man?³⁵

This discussion leads to the all-important distinction between two concepts of conscience:

The statement that each should live according to his conscience is itself—obviously—completely correct. The only question is what one understands by “conscience.” If one uses conscience to justify staying faithfully in the current system, then “conscience” is evidently not being used to refer to the call of God common to all, but rather to a social reflex, the superego of the respective group. . . . Conscience itself . . . surely cannot say something different to each person: that one must be a Hindu, the other a Muslim, another a cannibal. . . Living according to conscience does not mean enclosing oneself in one’s so-called convictions, but following this call that is made to every person: the call to faith and love.³⁶

At this point some of the fundamental features of what Gavin D’Costa calls restrictivist inclusivism are evident. The religions are not salvific structures as such, but followers of non-

³⁵ Ibid. For the personal background of this argument, see Joseph Ratzinger, *On Conscience* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), p. 17. For different versions of the argument in later writings, see Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, pp. 201–207; Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008), p. 92.

³⁶ ‘No Salvation Outside the Church?’ in *The Ratzinger Reader*, pp. 156. For a development on the two levels of conscience and moral responsibility, see Ratzinger, *On Conscience*, pp. 30–38. See also Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, p. 206; Twomey, *Conscience of Our Age*, pp. 122–7; Nichols, *Pope Benedict XVI*, pp. 221–2; Peter Casarella, ‘Culture and Conscience’, in *Explorations in the Theology of Benedict XVI*, ed. John C. Cavadini (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), pp. 63–86, at p. 71.

Christian religions can be saved by heeding the call of their conscience to faith and love. In this process, elements in the various non-Christian cultures or religions can help.³⁷ Alongside a more forceful emphasis on truth, Ratzinger repeats these fundamental convictions on several occasions around the turn of the millennium, at the height of his involvement in disputes concerning the theology of religions.

For example, in his presentation of *Dominus Iesus* in 2000, Cardinal Ratzinger offers an interpretation of John Paul II's words in the 1990 encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* which mention the Spirit's work 'not only in human hearts, but also in religions'.³⁸ Ratzinger comments: 'The good that is present in the various religions offers paths toward salvation and does so as part of the activity of the Spirit in Christ, but the religions themselves do not.'³⁹ In *Truth and Tolerance*, Ratzinger similarly says that 'salvation does not lie in religions as such, but it is connected to them, inasmuch as, and to the extent that, they lead man toward the search for God, for truth, and for love'.⁴⁰ Reflecting on Rom. 2:14–15, Ratzinger says that it is not so much in the religions as

³⁷ While D'Costa's definition of restrictivist inclusivism only mentions elements of cultures, not religions, nothing would be lost by including elements of religions in the definition as well, since it is anyhow excluded that the religions as such function as salvific structures. Here it might be recalled that in *Truth and Tolerance*, p. 59, Ratzinger says: 'In all known historical cultures, religion is an essential element of culture.'

³⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, 'Presentation of the Declaration *Dominus Iesus*,' in Joseph Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), pp. 209–216 at p. 213.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 213–214.

⁴⁰ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, p. 205.

it is in the conscience that all people can hear the voice of the one true good, one true God, and thus ‘transcend what is merely subjective in order to turn toward each other and toward God; And that is salvation’.⁴¹ Finally, in the first volume of *Jesus of Nazareth*, Ratzinger again speaks of the ‘salvation of those who do not know Christ’, and, based on the Beatitudes, argues that the ‘path that lies open to everyone’ is not simply to follow their religions but to ‘hunger and thirst for righteousness’, to become inwardly attentive to God’s silent exhortation, ‘which is present in us’. This way ‘finds its destination in Jesus Christ’.⁴²

Based on the above, it can be concluded that Ratzinger strongly resists pluralist and structural inclusivist attempts at making religious systems salvific as such, preferring to locate God’s salvific action in the human conscience that can always hear the silent call to faith, truth and love. On the other hand, it would be misleading to say without qualification that Ratzinger ‘insists that [non-Christian religions] are not vehicles of salvation’,⁴³ because to a certain degree and in a certain sense they can be. This is already evident from what has been quoted above, but it is most explicit in the 1996 interview *Salt of the Earth*, where Ratzinger also reveals his personal optimism about the frequency of such an occurrence: ‘It is definitely possible for someone to receive from his religion directives that help him become a pure person, which also, if we want to use the word, help him to please God and reach salvation. This is not at all excluded by what I said; on the contrary, this undoubtedly happens on a large scale.’⁴⁴ Towards

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 206–207.

⁴² Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, p. 92.

⁴³ Mong, *Non-Christians*, p. 43.

⁴⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth: The Church at the End of the Millennium*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), p. 24.

the end of the same book, Ratzinger says that the Christian can find ‘a secret working of God’ behind non-Christian religions, so that ‘through the other religions God touches man and brings him onto the path. But it is always the same God, the God of Jesus Christ.’⁴⁵

Consequently, although critical of pluralism and restrictivist as an inclusivist, Ratzinger is quite optimistic about the salvation of non-Christians and even about the salvific work of God through other religions. The key to appreciating this is the role Ratzinger assigns to conscience as the point of encounter with the one true God, present in all men of all religions. It is the ‘dynamic of the conscience and of the silent presence of God in it that is leading religions toward one another and guiding people onto the path of God’.⁴⁶

The Objective Aspect: Vicarious Representation

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 259. If both are rightly interpreted, Ratzinger’s position is well in line with *Dialogue and Proclamation*, the 1991 document of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. With reference to the Vatican II decree *Ad Gentes* (AG), the document states: ‘The mystery of salvation reaches out to them, in a way known to God, through the invisible action of the Spirit of Christ. Concretely, it will be in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions and by following the dictates of their conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God’s invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as their saviour (cf. AG 3,9,11).’ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 29. The full text is available at

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html

⁴⁶ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 54.

At this point, it is easy to anticipate objections to Ratzinger's position. In general, the Protestant tradition would raise doubts about salvation by works and ask whether it is not true that all fall short and stand in the need of Christ the mediator. The Catholic tradition, in turn, would inquire about the necessity of the Church and the sacraments for salvation.

Ratzinger includes both concerns in his elaboration of the concept of *Stellvertretung*, best translated as 'vicarious representation'.⁴⁷ Christopher Ruddy has argued that this concept represents the heart of Ratzinger's theology, shedding light on his vision of salvation history, christology, soteriology, and ecclesiology.⁴⁸ Yet, most commenters have not paid detailed attention to the idea,⁴⁹ and even fewer have recognized its implications for soteriological inclusivism.⁵⁰ Ratzinger's most comprehensive analysis of the topic is found in an article titled 'Stellvertretung', in *Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe*, written in 1959–1963, but only

⁴⁷ See Ruddy, "For the Many," p. 564. It 'literally means a representation standing for or in the place of something or someone else.' Other proposed translations include representation, substitution, and vicarious substitution.

⁴⁸ Ruddy, "For the Many," 563–567.

⁴⁹ See Ruddy, "For the Many," p. 564–565.

⁵⁰ For examples of missing the inclusivist implications, see Mannion, *The Ratzinger Reader*, p. 154; Thomas P. Rausch, *Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to His Theological Vision*, New York: Paulist Press, 2009), p. 103; Blanco Sarto, *La Teología*, pp. 380–381. By contrast, the inclusivist dimension is noticed by Nichols, *Pope Benedict XVI*, pp. 108–9; Twomey, *Conscience of Our Age*, p. 55; Ruddy, "For the Many," pp. 573–576.

published in English in 2011.⁵¹ This article also serves as the source for Ratzinger's treatment of the objective aspect of the salvation of non-Christians in 'Kein Heil außerhalb der Kirche?'⁵²

Ratzinger believes that vicarious representation is 'a fundamental category of biblical revelation', evident in the Old Testament already in the story of Abraham in Gen. 18:20ff and reaching its 'highpoint in the image of Moses in Deuteronomy and in the Songs of the Lord's Servant in Deutero-Isaiah', which in turn provides the link with the New Testament and the figure of Jesus: 'From him New Testament theology is first and foremost a theology of vicarious representation.'⁵³

This has consequences for Christian existence as a whole:

With his baptism, Jesus takes on the mission of the Servant and from then on his whole life is existence for others, which reaches its completion in the baptism of his death. . . At the Last Supper, he interprets his whole earthly life through the Isaian theme of service "for the many". . . Since this eucharistic meal will become the integrating centre of the Christian community and give Christian living its fundamental qualification, both of these have as a consequence their deepest meaning in the mystery of vicarious representation. Christians live first of all totally from the Lord's service of representation and at the same time they receive it as the basic law of their own being.⁵⁴

Ratzinger then traces the New Testament theology of vicarious representation as found in Pauline and Johannine writings, especially in Paul's treatment of the *Stellvertretung* of Jews and

⁵¹ Joseph Ratzinger, 'Stellvertretung,' *Handbuch Theologischer Grundbegriffe*, ed. Heinrich Fries, 2 vols. (Munich: Kösel Verlag, 1962–1963), 2:566–575. English: 'Vicarious Representation,' trans. Jared Wicks, S.J., *Letter & Spirit* 7 (2011): 209–220.

⁵² Ratzinger, *Das Neue Volk Gottes*, p. 173.

⁵³ Ratzinger, 'Vicarious Representation', p. 212.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

Gentiles in Rom. 9–11, as well as his theology of the two Adams. Having pointed to the Augustinian notion of *Christus totus, caput et membra* and the motif of Alexandrian theology where the church senses itself oriented beyond itself toward the whole of humanity, Ratzinger says that the doctrine of vicarious representation is again gaining influence because of Karl Barth's important interpretation of Romans 9–11.⁵⁵

For Ratzinger, *Stellvertretung* can give new meaning to ideas that today seem 'hardly tenable', such as 'the notion of no salvation outside the church'. 'Christians of today will surely not hold stubbornly that they alone can attain salvation.' With the concept of vicarious representation, the necessity of the church for salvation can be understood 'in a fresh way', realizing that 'in the body of humanity there are necessary works of service, which while not being required of all are nonetheless necessary for all, since all live from them'. Being Christian is 'being-for-the-others', carrying out a service whose greatness is not in 'our being saved while the others are lost' but in the fact that 'the others also reach salvation *through* this our service!' Christians will no longer worry about the brevity of the Christian era or the fact that the Christian message has only reached a fraction of humanity: 'For the church to be the means of salvation

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 213–217. Interestingly, in Pope Benedict XVI & Peter Seewald, *Last Testament: In His Own Words* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 152, Benedict XVI says: 'Already from Gottlieb Söhngen onwards I was a sort of Barthian, if also critical. He was one of the fathers of theology with whom I had grown up. Then the connection with Balthasar came along; he was a great friend of Barth.' In *Christian Brotherhood*, first published in 1960, the idea of vicarious representation is introduced through Balthasar's interpretation of Barth. See Joseph Ratzinger, *Christian Brotherhood* (London: Burns & Oates, 2006), pp. 75–85.

for all, it does not have to extend itself visibly to all. . . the church is the little flock, through which God however intends to save “the many”.⁵⁶

Having explained the basic structure of the notion, Ratzinger dispels suspicions of universalism or *apokatastasis* with an elucidation of the relationship between the subjective and objective aspects of his inclusivist theory. The answer also addresses the relationship between the doctrine of grace and the idea of a *votum ecclesiae*, which in its vulgar form (understood as ‘some kind of good faith or sincerity’) Ratzinger calls ‘semi-pelagian’:

It is also clear that the salvation arising in virtue of vicarious representation does not arrive mechanically in a person, but requires in the recipient some kind of openness and readiness. . . A Pauline type of *pistis* [faith] must be somehow present, but we do not have to determine in detail what this could be. One might even speak of this attitude of openness as a *votum ecclesiae* [desire of being in the church], but one must not forget that this is only the subjective side of a totality which only has sense and meaning through the objective reality of the vicarious representation of the *Christus totus* [the whole Christ]. Neglect of this leads to practically declaring that human good will is itself the sufficient principle of salvation for the larger portion of humanity—which is to surrender the whole doctrine of grace.⁵⁷

Another possible objection, one that is not addressed in *Stellvertretung*, is taken up in ‘Kein Heil außerhalb der Kirche?’ Nichols formulates it as follows: If Christ saves the Many through the vicarious representation of the Few, ‘what is the necessity for the Few to evangelise directly, to add to their own number by subtracting from that of the Many?’⁵⁸ Ratzinger responds by saying that the significance of mission is lost ‘if other religions *as such* are declared to be ways of salvation’, whereas the doctrine of *Stellvertretung* is open to the imperative of mission. He recalls the axiom so emphatically formulated by Pseudo-Dionysius, *bonum diffusivum sui*: ‘the

⁵⁶ Ratzinger, ‘Vicarious Representation,’ pp. 217–218.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 219.

⁵⁸ Nichols, *Pope Benedict XVI*, p. 109.

good must of necessity flow out beyond itself; the desire to share belongs intrinsically and necessarily to the good as such. . . . The Church too can only fulfil itself in the “diffundere”, in the sharing, in the missionary self-transcendence.’⁵⁹

As Twomey and Ruddy have pointed out, the concept of *Stellvertretung* is especially characteristic of Ratzinger’s early period (late 1950s to late 1960s), although he continues to employ it in later decades as well.⁶⁰ Significantly, however, the inclusivist application of the doctrine is absent from Ratzinger’s major writings on the theology of religions during his positions as the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and as the Bishop of Rome.⁶¹ This might be related to the fact that the doctrine of *Stellvertretung*, especially with its inclusivist application, does not have an established status in official Catholic teaching. In Ratzinger’s words, the concept has been ‘largely relegated to the literature of edification and spirituality’ and it generally ‘plays only a meager role in theology’.⁶² However, after a prolonged

⁵⁹ Ratzinger, ‘No Salvation Outside the Church?’, in *The Ratzinger Reader*, p. 159.

⁶⁰ Twomey, *Conscience of Our Age*, pp. 55–56; Ruddy, ‘For the Many,’ pp. 566–567. In addition to ‘Vicarious Representation’ and ‘No Salvation Outside the Church?’, the inclusivist application is present in *Christian Brotherhood, What It Means to Be a Christian*, as well as ‘God’s Yes and His Love Are Maintained Even in Death,’ a text published originally in 1978 and available in English in Joseph Ratzinger, *God Is Near Us: The Eucharist, the Heart of Life* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001), pp. 27–41.

⁶¹ For example, in *Truth and Tolerance*, Ratzinger repeats the subjective aspect of his theory, as we have seen, but not the objective one. The same is true for the passage on the salvation of non-Christians in *Jesus of Nazareth*.

⁶² Ratzinger, ‘Vicarious Representation,’ p. 209.

silence, the idea makes an unexpected return in an interview given in 2015 by the Pope Emeritus to Jacques Servais, S.J., and published on March 17, 2016, by the *Osservatore Romano*.⁶³ The interview provides evidence of a remarkable continuity in Ratzinger's personal soteriology, demonstrating his continued preference for *Stellvertretung* inclusivism.

In the interview, Benedict XVI is emphatic on the Catholic Church's abandonment of exclusivism: 'a profound evolution of dogma' has taken place, where the 'understanding that God cannot let go to perdition all the unbaptized' has been 'fully affirmed' since the middle of the 20th century, while the contrary has been 'finally abandoned' after the Second Vatican Council. As for the theories regarding the salvation of non-Christians, Benedict first mentions Karl Rahner's theory of 'anonymous Christians', which he criticizes for reducing the faith 'to a pure conscious presentation of what a human being is in himself' and 'overlooking the drama of change and renewal that is central to Christianity'. After rejecting pluralistic theories as even less acceptable, Benedict recalls the concept of vicarious representation, which was reflected upon by 'above all Henri de Lubac and with him some other theologians'.⁶⁴

For them the "pro-existence" ("being for") of Christ would be an expression of the fundamental figure of the Christian life and of the Church as such. It is true that the problem is not fully resolved, but it seems to me that this, in fact, is the key insight that thus impacts the existence of the individual Christian. Christ, as the unique One, was and is for all Christians, who in Paul's awesome imagery make up Christ's body in this world and thus participate in this "being-for." Christians, so to speak, are not so for themselves, but are, with Christ, for others.

This does not mean having some sort of special ticket for entering into eternal happiness, but rather the vocation to build the whole. What the human person needs in order to be saved is a

⁶³ 'The Christian Life is Not an Idea But a Life', trans. Robert Moyhinan, available at

<http://insidethevatican.com/magazine/pope/benedict-xvi-speeches/christian-faith-not-idea-life>.

⁶⁴ Ibid. The other theologians Benedict has in mind here would probably include von Balthasar, Congar, and Ratzinger himself. See Ruddy, 'For the Many,' pp. 565–567.

profound openness with regards to God, a profound expectation and acceptance of Him, and this correspondingly means that we, together with the Lord whom we have encountered, go towards others and seek to make visible to them the advent of God in Christ.

It is possible to explain this “being for” in a somewhat more abstract way. It is important to mankind that there is truth in it, this is believed and practiced. That one suffers for it. That one loves. These realities penetrate with their light into the world as such and support it.

I think that in this present situation it becomes for us ever more clear what the Lord said to Abraham, that is, that ten righteous men would have been sufficient to save a city, but that it destroys itself if such a small number is not reached. It is clear that we need to further reflect on the whole question.⁶⁵

In these personal reflections Benedict XVI reveals his continued support for *Stellvertretung*: ‘it seems to me that this, in fact, is the key insight’. At the same time, there is a recognition of the controversial or indefinite nature of the proposal, for Benedict admits that the issue ‘is not fully resolved’ and that ‘we need to further reflect on the whole question’. This might help explain Ratzinger’s relative silence with regard to ecclesial *Stellvertretung* in the 1980s–2010s while serving as prefect and pope. It seems that Benedict XVI did not consider the theory certain enough to be elevated to the status of official teaching.

From this perspective, it is all the more interesting to consider one final aspect of Ratzinger’s inclusivist soteriology, namely his interpretation of the doctrine of purgatory. Remarkably, what Ratzinger once proposed as a private theologian, Benedict XVI not only incorporated into the teaching of a papal encyclical, but also expanded so as to make it immediately relevant to the question of the salvation of non-Christians. In fact, a close reading of *Spe Salvi* will reveal that a thoroughly Ratzingerian inclusivism is at work, including elements from both the subjective and objective aspects of Ratzinger’s preferred theory. At the same time, Ratzinger’s inclusivism is extended to include the dynamics of the judgment in the hereafter.

⁶⁵ ‘The Christian Life is Not an Idea But a Life.’

Benedict XVI's Inclusivist Interpretation of Purgatory

Ratzinger first published *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*⁶⁶ in 1977, as a part of a project to produce a dogmatic theology in a small, paperback format. In his 1998 autobiography, Ratzinger describes *Eschatology* as his 'most thorough work', in which he was able to say 'something new and yet completely within the faith of the Church'.⁶⁷ In *Last Testament*, Pope Benedict confesses that what he considered about eschatology in general and purgatory in particular has greatly helped him in facing the prospect of death.⁶⁸ This shows that Ratzinger's interpretation of purgatory is not merely a matter of academic speculation but a deeply-held theological conviction, which helps explain why Benedict XVI goes so far as to incorporate a version of the interpretation in an official papal encyclical.

In *Eschatology*, after an investigation of the history of the theology of purgatory, Ratzinger formulates his contemporary understanding in the following words:

Purgatory is not. . . some kind of supra-worldly concentration camp where man is forced to undergo punishment in a more or less arbitrary fashion. Rather is it the inwardly necessary process of transformation in which a person becomes capable of Christ, capable of God and thus capable of unity with the whole communion of saints. Simply to look at people with any degree of realism at all is to grasp the necessity of such a process. It does not replace grace by works, but allows the former to achieve its full victory precisely as grace. What actually saves is the full assent of faith. But in most of us, that basic option is buried under a great deal of wood, hay and straw. . . Man is the recipient of divine mercy, yet this does not exonerate him from the need of

⁶⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 2nd edition, trans. Michael Waldstein (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988.)

⁶⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs 1927–1977*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), p. 150.

⁶⁸ Benedict XVI & Seewald, *Last Testament*, p. 12.

being transformed. Encounter with the Lord is this transformation. It is the fire that burns away our dross and re-forms us to be vessels of eternal joy.⁶⁹

In this text we find familiar elements of Ratzingerian soteriology. Salvation is transformation by grace through faith as well as entrance into communion with God, Christ, the church, the communion of saints. But in ‘most of us’, the assent of faith is feeble and the transformation incomplete, wherefore a purging encounter with the Lord becomes necessary before entrance into eternal joy. Although non-Christians are not explicitly spoken of in *Eschatology* (the text only speaks about ‘us’, which might be interpreted as Christians), it is clear that Ratzinger’s interpretation of purgatory is open to an inclusivist application, as made patent in *Spe Salvi*.

In the afterword to the English edition of *Eschatology*, published in 1988, Ratzinger brings up the insufficient attention given to his reinterpretation of purgatory: ‘I also tried to give the question of Purgatory a new twist, on the basis of Scripture and Fathers, and to put it in its ecumenical context. It would give me pleasure if this part of my study were also discussed and proved able to stimulate wider reflection.’⁷⁰ This sheds more light on the reason why Benedict XVI wished to restate his interpretation in a papal encyclical in 2007.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, pp. 230–231.

⁷⁰ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, p. 273.

⁷¹ In fact, Benedict XVI’s strategy proved successful, for the encyclical did provoke new ecumenical debate on the topic. For a Protestant critique, see Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK, 2007), pp. 178–183. For a Protestant rebuttal of Wright in defense of Benedict, see Jerry L. Walls, *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 117–119.

In the meanwhile, an important step was taken in Catholic theology with regard to the doctrine of purgatory and the theology of religions. In 1992, Ratzinger's future colleague at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Joseph Augustine DiNoia, suggested that the concept of purgatory can be applied to the salvation of non-Christians: 'there is no reason in principle to rule it out for non-Christians', for according to Catholic doctrine 'purgatory provides for an interval for the rectification of whatever is lacking in any human being who dies justified or in the state of grace, but unprepared for the full enjoyment of bliss'.⁷²

Against this background, we can now consider the restatement of Ratzinger's interpretation of purgatory in the 2007 encyclical *Spe Salvi*. In the section titled 'Judgment as a setting for learning and practising hope', Pope Benedict XVI first presents the extreme cases of people who have 'totally destroyed their desire for truth and readiness to love' and those who 'are utterly pure, completely permeated by God' – those whose immediate destinies upon death are hell and heaven, respectively. Then, with reference to 1 Cor 3:12–15, the pope writes:

Yet we know from experience that neither case is normal in human life. For the great majority of people—we may suppose—there remains in the depths of their being an ultimate interior openness to truth, to love, to God. In the concrete choices of life, however, it is covered over by ever new compromises with evil—much filth covers purity, but the thirst for purity remains and it still constantly re-emerges from all that is base and remains present in the soul. What happens to such individuals when they appear before the Judge? Will all the impurity they have amassed through life suddenly cease to matter? What else might occur? . . . Some recent theologians are of the opinion that the fire which both burns and saves is Christ himself, the Judge and Saviour. The encounter with him is the decisive act of judgement. Before his gaze all falsehood melts

⁷² DiNoia, *Diversity of Religions*, pp. 104–105. For further development and discussion with reference to both Ratzinger and DiNoia and in relation to the doctrine of limbo, see D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, pp. 188–194.

away. This encounter with him, as it burns us, transforms and frees us, allowing us to become truly ourselves.⁷³

More explicitly than in *Eschatology*, Benedict XVI now applies his interpretation of purgatory to ‘the great majority of people’ in general. The pope is not speaking only about the Christian life but about ‘human life’, evidently including non-Christians. The decisive ‘ultimate interior openness to truth, to love, to God’ unmistakably echoes the many Ratzingerian statements about the subjective aspect of the salvation examined in the previous section. Even more interestingly, Benedict XVI also relates the purgatorial solution to the objective aspect. Already in *Eschatology*, Ratzinger had argued that purgatory cannot simply be an individual event that would rule out ‘all replacement or substitution’, for ‘the being of man is not, in fact, that of a closed monad’.⁷⁴ In *Spe Salvi* he returns to the question in the following words:

Now a further question arises: if “Purgatory” is simply purification through fire in the encounter with the Lord, Judge and Saviour, how can a third person intervene. . .? When we ask such a question, we should recall that no man is an island, entire of itself. Our lives are involved with one another, through innumerable interactions they are linked together. No one lives alone. No one sins alone. No one is saved alone. The lives of others continually spill over into mine: in what I think, say, do and achieve. And conversely, my life spills over into that of others: for better and for worse. So my prayer for another is not something extraneous to that person, something external, not even after death. . . In this way we further clarify an important element of the Christian concept of hope. Our hope is always essentially also hope for others; only thus is it truly hope for me too. As Christians we should never limit ourselves to asking: how can I save myself? We should also ask: what can I do in order that others may be saved and that for them too the star of hope may rise?⁷⁵

⁷³ Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi* (30 Nov 2007) 46–47, available at

http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html#_ftnref38.

⁷⁴ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, pp. 231–232.

⁷⁵ Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 48.

Here elements of Ratzinger's theology of *Stellvertretung* extend to the afterlife as well.

Christians are not supposed to hope only for their own salvation but also for the salvation of others, and they can help others reach it not simply by evangelising or converting them but also by praying for them, even after their death. Ratzinger's interpretation of purgatory thus completes his inclusivist theory, bringing the subjective and objective aspects together in the dynamics of the judgment in the hereafter.

Conclusion

In *What It Means to Be a Christian*, the young Joseph Ratzinger expresses a conviction that God is able to save non-Christians and that 'we do not need to help him do it with our cogitations'.⁷⁶ Decades later, in *Truth and Tolerance*, Ratzinger asks: 'Do we necessarily have to invent a theory about how God can save people without abandoning the uniqueness of Christ?'⁷⁷ He suggests that 'the highest respect for the mystery of God's activity' should always be the guide in approaching a question 'that can in fact be decided only by him who shall judge the world'.⁷⁸ At one point, it seems that Ratzinger would only be willing to offer thoughts about how non-Christians might achieve righteousness in this world, whereas in terms of the judgment in the

⁷⁶ Ratzinger, *What It Means*, p. 46.

⁷⁷ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, p. 53.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 53, 18.

hereafter, ‘what God makes of the poor broken pieces of our attempts at good, at approaching him, remains his secret, which we ought not to presume to try to work out’.⁷⁹

Despite all these caveats, we have seen that Ratzinger does in fact offer a rather comprehensive theory about the salvation of non-Christians, including both a subjective aspect (an openness to God who is always present in the human conscience with his call to self-transcending faith and love) and an objective aspect (the vicarious representation of *Christus totus* for the salvation of ‘the Many’), and extending from this life to the next (purgatory).

It has been demonstrated that Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI has been a consistent soteriological inclusivist since the turn of the 1960s until his retirement as Pope Emeritus. In more precise terms, following Gavin D’Costa’s classification, Joseph Ratzinger can be characterized as a restrictivist inclusivist, which means that he restricts God’s salvific work in followers of other religions primarily to their conscience and secondarily to the impetus given by certain positive elements in their religions, not to the various religious systems *per se*. At the same time, it must be emphasized that restrictivist inclusivism implies no restriction upon the number of the saved.

Indeed, a restrictive inclusivist can equally well be a pessimistic inclusivist or an optimistic inclusivist. The former would hold that only a few non-Christians are in fact saved, whereas the latter would hold that a great many non-Christians are saved. Here it is clear that – perhaps contrary to popular imagination – Ratzinger emerges as a strong soteriological optimist. He believes that non-Christians who are helped by their religions to attain salvation are not a rare exception but that this ‘happens on a large scale’.⁸⁰ With his interpretation of purgatory, Benedict

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 205–207.

⁸⁰ Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, p. 24

XVI can suppose that ‘the great majority of people’ finally make their way to heaven through the purifying encounter with Christ.⁸¹ Against Ambrose Mong’s claim that an Augustinian pessimism shapes Ratzinger’s negative attitude toward religious pluralism,⁸² it should rather be said with Robert Barron that *Spe Salvi* – like Ratzinger’s soteriological inclusivism as a whole – offers perspectives ‘infinitely more generous than anything in the Augustinian tradition’.⁸³

⁸¹ Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 47.

⁸² Mong, *Non-Christians*, p. 13. I take it that this erroneous preconception is at the root of Mong’s erroneous characterisation of Ratzinger as a soteriological exclusivist.

⁸³ Robert Barron, foreword to Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope “That All Men Be Saved”?: With a Short Discourse on Hell* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014), p. xi. In the same vein, Cyril O’Regan notes that despite his general Augustinianism, Benedict is considerably less certain than Augustine on the heavy population of hell. Cyril O’Regan, ‘Benedict the Augustinian,’ in *Explorations*, pp. 21–60 at p. 30.